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DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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UDALL ASKS WILDLIFE ADVISORS TO STUDY HOW TO COMPLETE
NATIONAL REFUGE SYSTEM

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall today announced he has asked his Department's Advisory Board on Wildlife and Game Management to study "what the National Wildlife Refuge System should be, if it could be rounded out, filled in or otherwise altered and completed to include all that our national wildlife lands and waters should include or, conversely, need not or should not include."

In letters to the Board members, Secretary Udall said the assignment "could tax the best efforts of even such a talented body as your blue-ribbon 'Leopold Committee,'" The Advisory Board's chairman is Dr. A. Starker Leopold of Berkeley, California, assistant to the chancellor, University of California at Berkeley, and a professor of zoology at the university.

Secretary Udall asked the advisory members to decide when they can meet in Washington this spring to map plans for launching the study.

It is "crystal clear that we are expecting a tremendous contribution from the Board," he wrote. "The study will of necessity cover a broad field," and he listed the following as "only a few highlights" to be considered:

"Except for the Game Ranges and a few special refuges, the National Wildlife Refuge System has developed mainly in relation to migratory waterfowl. And to a considerable degree the System has grown opportunistically, rather than on a planned scientific basis. This has been fine as far as it has gone, but we face broader responsibilities today. It is proper that the heart of the refuge system has been concern for migratory waterfowl, but old concepts have now so widened that the system includes Game Ranges for large wide-ranging species and special refuges for certain endangered species.

"On the latter point, we are confronted with a public interest in rare and endangered species that far transcends past concerns. This new awareness covers a large number of species, not only mammals and birds but other vertebrates such as reptiles, amphibia and fishes. We welcome this fresh interest but it does present unmet challenges and complications in fulfilling our obligation to the public to develop an adequate Refuge System.

"Land for refuges becomes more difficult to obtain as time passes, not only because of its scarcity and competing uses for it, but also because of the rapidly inflating prices.

"For all these reasons, our Refuge System is incomplete and has not been assembled scientifically. We realize that social and political and economic realities are the very stuff of government, and that opportunities are worth the grasping, but nevertheless we should be able to make better informed scientific judgments. The Congress would welcome this improvement in the information process as much as we, would too. There is not the slightest suggestion intended that even the soundest scientific reason for establishing or enlarging a refuge area will automatically cause it to be done. For one overriding reason, Man has preempted so many of the finest potential refuge areas, absolutely beyond any rational hope of recall. So your recommendations will have to be constrained by what possibilities remain. We do not expect to ask you to waste your time on musing what a magnificent refuge for ducks the Island of Manhattan could make.

"You will want to weigh the role of State and private refuges in relationship to the National System, the general problem of estuaries and associated marsh habitats, the fast-approaching time when duck stamp incomes must be devoted to repaying advances for the wetlands, acquisition program -- a program depressingly behind schedule because of the gap between authorization and appropriations.

"Is there a demand which must be met for establishing refuges to spread hunting opportunities among the States? Or should this demand be rejected?"

Earlier studies by the "Leopold Committee" led to Departmental policy statements on wildlife management in the National Park System and on changes in the predator and rodent control program of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

In asking the Board to accept the newest assignment, Secretary Udall wrote:

"I want to repeat what I told you in appointing the Board on April 27, 1962: I cannot and do not abdicate the responsibility which is mine for the difficult decisions which must be made, and I am not asking the Board to exercise these functions. However, your wisdom and experience and the membership's collective judgment will be of extreme help in formulating the Department's recommendations to the Congress and in reaching decisions on matters for which the Executive Branch bears responsibility."

Other members of the Advisory Board include:

Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Vienna, Va., President of the Wildlife Management Institute and a former Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Dr. Clarence Cottam, Sinton, Texas, director of the Welder Wildlife Foundation and a former assistant director of the Fish and Wildlife Service; Thomas L. Kimball, McLean, Va., executive director of the National Wildlife Federation.

Secretary Udall said he would name a replacement soon to fill the vacancy on the Board created when Dr. Stanley A. Cain, Ann Arbor, Michigan, then chairman of the Department of Conservation at the University of Michigan, was appointed by President Johnson to be Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.